



USTR About USTR

< [About USTR](#)



USTR's Role

[USTR Home](#)

[SEARCH / SITE MAP](#)

[USTR
Activities](#)

[WTO & MULTI-
LATERAL AFFAIRS](#)

[WORLD REGIONS](#)

[SECTORS](#)

[TRADE AND
ENVIRONMENT](#)

[MONITORING &
ENFORCEMENT](#)

[TRADE AND
DEVELOPMENT](#)

[OUTREACH](#)

[ABOUT USTR](#)

Resources:

[Recent Postings](#)

[Press Releases](#)

[Federal Register](#)

[Notices](#)

[Speeches &](#)

[Testimony](#)

[Reports](#)

U.S. Trade Policy

American trade policy aims to create growth and raise living standards by opening markets abroad and maintaining an open-market policy at home; promote the rule of law and defend the rights of U.S. workers, farmers and businesses, and create worldwide opportunities for economic development and technological progress. Our work proceeds in the World Trade Organization, in regional fora in each part of the world, and with all our major trading partners as well as through the execution of American trade laws.

USTR's Role in Trade Policy

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) is responsible for developing and coordinating U.S. international trade, commodity, and direct investment policy, and leading or directing negotiations with other countries on such matters. The U.S. Trade Representative is a Cabinet member who serves as the President's principal trade advisor, negotiator, and spokesperson on trade and related investment matters.

Like the National Security Council or Council of Economic Advisors, USTR is part of the Executive Office of the President. Through an interagency structure, the USTR coordinates trade policy, resolves disagreements, and frames issues for Presidential decision. The USTR also serves as Vice Chairman of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), is a non-voting member of the Export-Import Bank, and a member of the National Advisory Committee on International Monetary and Financial Policies.

"USTR" refers both to the agency and to the agency head, the U.S. Trade Representative.

Our Expertise

The agency provides trade policy leadership and negotiating expertise in its major areas of responsibility, including:

- all matters within the World Trade Organization (WTO)
- trade, commodity, and direct investment matters managed by international institutions such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
- expansion of market access for American goods and services;
- industrial and services trade policy
- international commodity agreements and policy
- bilateral and multilateral trade and investment issues
- trade-related intellectual property protection issues
- negotiations affecting U.S. import policies.

The agency also has administrative responsibility for the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and Section 301 complaints against foreign unfair trade practices, as well as Section 1377, Section 337 and import relief cases under Section 201.



Interagency Coordination

USTR engages in extensive interagency coordination on trade policy matters. Such coordination is accomplished through the Trade Policy Review Group (TPRG) and the Trade Policy Staff Committee (TPSC). These groups, administered and chaired by USTR and composed of 17 Federal agencies and offices, make up the sub-cabinet-level mechanism for developing and coordinating U.S. Government positions on international trade and trade-related investment issues.

The TPSC is the primary operating group, with representation at the senior civil servant level. Supporting the TPSC are more than 60 subcommittees responsible for specialized areas and several task forces that work on particular issues. If agreement is not reached in the TPSC, or if significant policy questions are being considered, then issues are taken up by the TPRG (Deputy USTR/Under Secretary level).

The final tier of the interagency trade policy mechanism is the National Economic Council (NEC), chaired by the President. The NEC Deputies' committee considers memoranda from the TPRG, as well as important or controversial trade-related issues.

Coordination with the Private Sector*- Including Civil Society

The private sector* plays a continuing role in trade negotiations through the mechanism of advisory committees. This advisory process has been extremely successful during negotiations on China's accession to the WTO; the multilateral agreements on information technology, financial services and basic telecommunications; as well as the NAFTA and Uruguay Round negotiations, the Summit of the Americas and in Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) initiatives. Congress provided for continuation of the advisory process in the Trade Agreements Act of 1979. The committees' role has been expanded to include advice on the operation of trade Agreements, on the development and implementation of overall U.S. trade policy, and on priorities for actions to implement such policy.

Primary objectives of the private sector advisory system are: to consult with the U.S. government on negotiation of trade agreements, to assist in monitoring compliance with the agreements and to provide input and advice on the development of U.S. trade policy. The advisory system is composed of a series of Committees with differing responsibilities. The Advisory Committee on Trade Policy and Negotiations (ACTPN), a Presidentially appointed committee, has 45 members from representative elements of the U.S. economy with international trade interests. Its mandate is to provide overall policy guidance on trade issues.

At the next level, the six policy advisory committees include the Intergovernmental Policy Advisory Committee, the Trade Advisory Committee on Africa, the Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee, Labor Advisory Committee, Defense Policy Advisory Committee, and Trade and Environment Policy Advisory Committee. Each committee provides advice based upon the perspective of its specific sector or area.

In addition, functional committees have been established to monitor certain codes of conduct negotiated during Tokyo Round negotiations on the GATT. The Industry Sector Advisory Committees have two such functional committees: customs valuation and standards. The Labor Advisory Committee has three such functional committees: government procurement, standards, and unfair trade practices. Finally, a committee has been established to deal exclusively with intellectual property issues.

Working with Congress

Since its creation, USTR has maintained close consultation with Congress. Five Members from each House are formally appointed under statute as official Congressional advisors on trade policy, and additional Members may be appointed as advisors on particular issues or negotiations. Liaison activities between the agency and Congress are extensive.

USTR has offices in Washington, D.C. and in Geneva, Switzerland. The Washington, D.C. office of USTR is structured along five organizational lines:

Bilateral Negotiations:

- Western Hemisphere (Canada, Mexico, South America and the Caribbean Basin)
- Europe and the Mediterranean
- Japan
- China
- Asia and the Pacific (Korea, Southeast Asia, South Asia and Oceania)
- Africa

Multilateral Negotiations:

- World Trade Organization and Multilateral Affairs
- GSP and the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development

Sectoral Activities:

- Financial and Investment Policy
- Industrial Affairs
- Agricultural Affairs
- Textiles
- Environment and Natural Resources
- Services, Investment and Intellectual Property

Analysis, Legal Affairs and Policy Coordination:

- General Counsel
- Economic Affairs
- Policy Development and Coordination

Public Outreach:

- Congressional Affairs
- Public/Media Affairs
- Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Liaison

USTR's Geneva Office is organized to cover general WTO affairs, Non-Tariff Agreements, Agricultural Policy, Commodity Policy and the Harmonized Code System. Special attention is given to textiles with one member of the staff designated as U.S. Representative to the Textiles Surveillance Body. The Geneva Deputy USTR is the U.S. Ambassador to the WTO and to the UNCTAD on commodity matters. The Geneva staff represents the United States' interests in negotiations, and in other contacts on trade and trade policy in both forums.

* The term "private sector" shall be taken to include business, labor, environmental, consumer, and other non-governmental organizations and the Advisory Committee System. The Advisory Committee System, established by Congress in 1974, ensures that U.S. trade policy and trade negotiation objectives adequately reflect U.S. commercial and economic interests. Congress expanded and enhanced the role of this system in three subsequent trade acts. The term "private sector" shall also include state and local associations, sub-federal governments and official state points of contact, although the latter are in fact public offices.

[USTR HOME](#) | [WTO & Multilateral Affairs](#) | [World Regions](#) | [Sectors](#) | [Trade & Environment](#)
[Monitoring & Enforcement](#) | [Trade & Development](#) | [Outreach](#) | [About USTR](#)

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[Speeches and Testimony](#) | [Reports and Publications](#) | [SEARCH / SITE MAP](#)

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Trade Policy Advisory Committee System

[USTR Home](#)[SEARCH / SITE MAP](#)[USTR
Activities](#)[WTO & MULTI-
LATERAL AFFAIRS](#)[WORLD REGIONS](#)[SECTORS](#)[TRADE AND
ENVIRONMENT](#)[MONITORING &
ENFORCEMENT](#)[TRADE AND
DEVELOPMENT](#)[OUTREACH](#)[ABOUT USTR](#)[Resources:](#)[Recent Postings](#)[Press Releases](#)[Federal Register
Notices](#)[Speeches &
Testimony](#)[Reports](#)

The U.S. Congress established the private sector advisory committee system in 1974 to ensure that U.S. trade policy and trade negotiation objectives adequately reflect U.S. commercial and economic interests. Congress expanded and enhanced the role of this system in three subsequent trade acts.

The advisory committees provide information and advice with respect to U.S. negotiating objectives and bargaining positions before entering into trade agreements, on the operation of any trade agreement once entered into, and on other matters arising in connection with the development, implementation, and administration of U.S. trade policy.

The trade policy advisory committee system consists of 33 advisory committees, with a total membership of up to 1,000 advisors. Recommendations for candidates for committee membership are collected from a number of sources including Members of Congress, associations and organizations, publications, and other individuals who have demonstrated an interest or expertise in U.S. trade policy. Membership selection is based on qualifications, geography, and the needs of the specific committee. Members pay for their own travel and other related expenses.

The system is arranged in three tiers: the President's Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations (ACTPN); six policy advisory committees; and 26 technical, sectoral, and functional advisory committees.

The President appoints 45 ACTPN members for two-year terms. The 1974 Trade Act requires that membership broadly represent key economic sectors affected by trade. The committee considers trade policy issues in the context of the overall national interest.



The six policy advisory committees are appointed by the USTR alone or in conjunction with other Cabinet officers. Those managed solely by USTR are the Intergovernmental Policy Advisory Committee (IGPAC), and the Trade Advisory Committee on Africa (TACA). Those policy advisory committees managed jointly with the Departments of Agriculture, Labor, and Defense and the Environmental Protection Agency are, respectively, the Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee (APAC), Labor Advisory Committee (LAC), Defense Policy Advisory Committee (DPACT), and

Trade and Environment Policy Advisory Committee (TEPAC). Each committee provides advice based upon the perspective of its specific area.

The 26 sectoral, functional, and technical advisory committees are organized in two areas: industry and agriculture. Representatives are appointed jointly by the USTR and the Secretaries of Commerce and Agriculture, respectively. Each sectoral or technical committee represents a specific sector or commodity group (such as textiles or dairy products) and provides specific technical advice concerning the effect that trade policy decisions may have on its sector. The four functional advisory committees provide cross-sectoral advice on customs, standards, intellectual property issues, and electronic commerce.

List of Advisory Committees

USTR Administered Committees

Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations (ACTPN) [charter ([pdf](#), [html](#)), roster ([pdf](#), [html](#))]

Intergovernmental Policy Advisory Committee (IGPAC) [charter ([pdf](#), [html](#)), roster ([pdf](#), [html](#))]

Trade Advisory Committee for Africa (TACA) [charter ([pdf](#), [html](#))]

USTR and Environmental Protection Agency Administered Committee

Trade and Environment Policy Advisory Committee (TEPAC) [charter ([pdf](#), [html](#)), roster ([pdf](#), [html](#))]

USTR and Department of Labor Administered Committee

Labor Advisory Committee (LAC) [charter ([pdf](#), [html](#)), roster ([pdf](#), [html](#))]

USTR and Department of Defense Administered Committee

Defense Policy Advisory Committee for Trade (DPACT) [charter ([pdf](#), [html](#)), roster ([pdf](#), [html](#))]

USTR and Department of Agriculture Administered Committees

For further information concerning the following committees, contact the [Foreign Agriculture Service](#) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. 🌾


Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee for Trade (APAC) [charter ([pdf](#), [html](#))]

Agricultural Technical Advisory Committee for Trade (ATAC) [charter ([pdf](#), [html](#))]

- in Animal and Animal Products
- in Fruits and Vegetables
- in Tobacco, Cotton and Peanuts
- in Sweeteners
- in Grains, Feed and Oilseeds

USTR and Department of Commerce Administered

Committees

For further information concerning the following committees, contact the [Industry Consultations Program](#) of the Trade Advisory Center of the U.S. Department of Commerce. The charters and rosters for each committee can be found at the following IFAC/ISAC websites. 

[Industry Functional Advisory Committee \(IFAC\)](#)

IFAC 1: Customs Matters

IFAC 2: Standards

IFAC 3: Intellectual Property Rights

IFAC 4: Electronic Commerce

[Industry Sector Advisory Committees \(ISACs\)](#)

ISAC 1: Aerospace Equipment

ISAC 2: Capital Goods

ISAC 3: Chemicals and Allied Products

ISAC 4: Consumer Goods

ISAC 5: Electronics and Instrumentation

ISAC 6: Energy

ISAC 7: Ferrous Ores and Metals

ISAC 8: Footwear, Leather and Leather Products

ISAC 9: Building Products and Other Material

ISAC 10: Lumber and Wood Products

ISAC 11: Nonferrous Ores & Metals

ISAC 12: Paper and Paper Products

ISAC 13: Services

ISAC 14: Small and Minority Business

ISAC 15: Textiles and Apparel

ISAC 16: Transportation, Construction and

Agricultural Equipment

ISAC 17: Wholesaling and Retailing

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[USTR HOME](#) | [WTO & Multilateral Affairs](#) | [World Regions](#) | [Sectors](#) | [Trade & Environment](#)
[Monitoring & Enforcement](#) | [Trade & Development](#) | [Outreach](#) | [About USTR](#)

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[Speeches and Testimony](#) | [Reports and Publications](#) | [SEARCH / SITE MAP](#)

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